TL 3459
CIDAC 00483
Centro de Documentação
25. NOV 1985

WHERE TO NOW?

Post-Nairobi reflections on East Timor, October 4 1985

Emilia Pires

First of all I want to take this opportunity to share with you some of my experiences during the Women's Decade Conference held in Nairobi in July. At the same time I would like to thank all of you who made it possible for me to attend.

The first two days of the NGO Conference were mainly for registration and getting to know the place. The opening ceremony was held on the third day at the Kenyatta Conference Hall, some 20 minutes walking distance from the university where most of the workshops were held.

As planned our workshop was held the day after the opening, along with many other workshops. It was well attended by women from many countries such as West Germany, Canada, Ireland, Netherlands, South Africa, Eritrea, Angola, Philippines, and the South Pacific islands, to name a few. I shouldn't forget to mention Indonesia which was well represented by 20 delegates including two 'bapaks' who were later identified as Indonesian intelligence officials.

Apart from taking our pictures, the Indonesian women very strongly defended their Government's policy on East Timor and throughout the workshop they tried very hard but,I'm glad to say,with no success at all, to deviate and confuse the theme of the workshop with talks on irrelevant issues. The audience were marvellous in their support for our cause, so much so that the Indonesians were forced to walk out before the workshop had actually ended.

The days after the workshop were mainly spent talking to as many women as possible about our struggle and making contacts to set up a network of support groups among women of different nations. We also collected some 1000 signatures on a petition to the United Nations.

Our time in Nairobi was wonderful and I was overwhelmed by the strong solidarity expressed to us by many women who gave us their whole-hearted support throughout the Conference. A very special thanks should go to the Australian women who once again proved to us

the difference between the Australian people and the Australian Government and who have continued their support since their return as my presence at this meeting shows.

This brings me to the question before us tonight: where to now?

Perhaps the best way to answer this important question is to outline some of the developments regarding East Timor since Nairobi and to indicate how I feel we can respond.

Before I do this, however, I want to stress a basic point. This is that the development of women in East Timor is inextricably linked with the political liberation of the East Timorese people as a whole.

In 1975 the Fretilin Party saw that women in East Timor were an oppressed group within East Timorese society and set out to do something about this by encouraging the formation of women's groups. This was a good start and we can speculate that if East Timor had become independent this process would have continued and advanced in the 10 years since then, that, in fact, the UN decade of development for all women, which also commenced in 1975, would have been matched by a decade of development for women in East Timor.

The sad fact is, however, that this Fretilin initiative was killed by the Indonesian invasion. What should have been a decade of development ended up being a decade of disaster for women in East Timor. What our sisters in East Timor have experienced has not been - to quote the Nairobi theme tune, 'equality, development and peace', but dispossession, suffering and war; or, to put it more concretely, the destruction of homes and villages, the killing of loved ones, forced resettlement, rape, imprisonment, and the forced imposition of a foreign language and system.

So we do not see any possibility of real development for women in East Timor until East Timor itself is liberated from Indonesian colonialism. The struggle of East Timorese women is one and the same as the struggle of all Timorese ~~from~~ for true equality, true development and true peace. At this point of time, therefore, your support for the women of East Timor has to take the form of support for our broad political struggle. That is why my answer to the question 'where to now?' must focus on the general situation

which afflicts all our people, including, but not only, women.

The most publicised development since Nairobi has been the Prime Minister's statement in August that Australia recognises what he called 'Indonesia's sovereign authority' over East Timor.

To be honest this statement is a serious setback for us, for three reasons. First, it has I think seriously depressed a lot of us. We feel a bit defeated. To be rewarded with this after so much work has been done and so many hopes pinned on the ALP is just too much. Not that we are giving up. But it does hurt and makes the hill we are climbing feel steeper. Second, Mr Hawke's statement will add to the suffering in East Timor for it it can only be interpreted by the Indonesian army as approval of what they are doing or, at the very least, a sign that they have nothing to fear from Canberra. Third, the statement, which has been widely publicised overseas, will further weaken support for our causd especially amongst those countries which take particular notice of Australia on the East Timor question.

But we have to resist Mr Hawke and strike back. We have to see, and help others see, his statement for what it is: a set of words empty of principles and moral content, totally devoid of compassion for the East Timorese people and dictated solely by political and commercial considerations such as oil in the Timor Sea. Furthermore the mere fact that Mr Hawke SAYS the East Timorese people are now citizens of Indonesia does not make them so in reality. Mr Hawke is not Moses. He doesn't make up the rules. Regardless of what Mr Hawke says we are not Indonesians. We are East Timorese and according to international law we have an inalienable right to <u>self</u>-determination, not <u>Hawke</u>-determination!

There have also been two important developments at the United Nations since Nairobi.

First the Committee which decides which issues the UN Commission on Human Rights will look at when it meets in Geneva next February decided recently not to include East Timor on the agenda. This too is a serious setback for us. This is the second time this year that this section of the UN concerned with human rights has dodged its responsibilities to East Timor despite some very telling

reports on the situation submitted by a range of Church bodies and NGOs such as Amnesty International. Australia, I am pleased to tell you, voted for the UN Human Rights Commission to continue monitoring human rights abuses in East Timor. What we have to do now, I believe, it to beseige Mr Hayden with requests that Australia formally move at the Human Rights Commission session in February that East Timor be restored to the agenda. I believe Mr Hayden is saying he has not been getting many letters on East Timor recently. We need to show him the concern is still there by writing and getting others to write. And in our letters we should argue that the issue of human rights in Timor should remain on the UN Commission's agenda until a full, independent and credible investigation of the situation in East Timor has been carried out and that it should not be dropped from the agenda until the international community is perfectly satisfied that our people are genuinely free of abuses. You might also remind him that this idea of an independent investigative mission also happens to be official Labor Party policy.

The second important development at the United Nations since Nairobi is that last month the UN Secretary-General was given another 12 months in which to find a solution to the East Timor conflict. He's been working on this since 1982 when the UN member states instructed him on their behalf to initiate consultations with the principal parties to the conflict with a view to achieving a comprehensive settlement. So East Timor is on the UN agenda at the highest level and is being actively worked on. Our wish is to keep it there and to push for a genuine solution based on our right to self-determination, a right the UN (and most countries, including Australia) recognises we have still not exercised.

To this point of time, however, the Secretary-General has only talked to two parties to the conflict, namely the two colonial powers of Portugal and Indonesia. He has not consulted the East Timorese people or the Fretilin resistance, and has not given any commitment to do so, even though we are obviously THE main group involved. How can any 'solution' which ignores and excludes us be expected to work? If we have demonstrated one thing over the last ten long years surely it is that we refuse to be over-ridden.

So over the next 12 months our priority is to increase public pressure on the UN to have the Secretary-General consult with us. This is our right and it is an absolute pre-requisite for lasting peace in East Timor.

Having asserted our wish and right to be heard, I have to add immediately that Mr Hawke is against this happening. For what he has done in his August statement is to say that the only party the UN Secretary-General should talk to is the Indonesian Government, that the Timorese no longer have any rights in the matter and in fact no longer exist as a people. Our campaign to be heard, therefore, has a major obstacle in the Prime Minister and this must be tackled.

Whether the Labor Party agrees with Mr Hawke we will not know clearly until its National Conference at Wrest Point Casino in Hobart July next year. Of course it is absolutely vital that this Conference be a success for East Timor. Ideally we would hope that a strong pro-Timor policy would be adopted, but in view of the forces against us, this may be impossible. What we can do, however, is to see that East Timor is an issue at the Conference and to demonstrate that support for our cause remains strong within both the Party and the general community. I know we can count on your support and that of many women in the ALP in our preparation for that event.

In conclusion I want to thank you again for this opportunity to speak for East Timor. We would welcome any other opening like this you can provide for us to speak. I think it is fair to claim that East Timor is now firmly on the agenda of the women's movement, just as it is actively on the agenda of hundreds of other community groups in Australia and the world. Recently, for example, we have received invitations to visit the Philippines and Canada. Japanese women are setting up support groups and a new support network has just been set up in Hong Kong. Our dance group in Darwin has just returned from a dancing tour of West Germany. There's a Benefit for Timor at the Fitzroy Town Hall on October 13, we are dancing for Fitzroy Children's week on October 27 and so on, and so on. This interest is a great encouragement for us. Please continue to use your conversations, your newsletters, your local and international meetings, your associations with the ALP and media, to speak for

us and to make openings for us, whether big or small, to speak for ourselves.

Thankyou for listening.